



COULEE CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2011

Chapter President's Message

In a prairie, colorful flowering plants and stately tall grasses capture the attention of most visitors. I'm certainly guilty of being hypnotized by bountiful blooms and grasses waving in the wind. However, a prairie, much to the dismay of some, is composed of more than just plants. We often overlook the charismatic *microfauna* – the invertebrates (insects, arachnids, snails) that live within the prairie and account for the bulk of species diversity. Oh, they do catch our attention at times – butterflies are colorful and relatively large compared to the majority of invertebrates found in prairies, but so many choose to ignore the rest of them, often writing them off as “creepy”, “gross” or “yucky”. I, however, am a fan of the underdog. I was attracted to prairies for this reason, so it's no wonder that I've become fascinated with prairie invertebrates. While out and about working on a prairie research project I came face-to-face (?) with so many species of insects that I had never seen before – and never would have noticed otherwise. The diversity of invertebrates is mindboggling! In fact, scientists can only guess how many insect species actually inhabit prairies. New species are still being discovered on a regular basis. They play important ecological roles, such as pollinator, grazer, predator, prey and parasite, which help make the prairies we protect what they are. For our next meeting (details inside) Dr. Kathryn Perez, professor of evolutionary biology and ecology at UW – La Crosse, will be discussing some of her work with the land snails that inhabit Driftless hill prairies. At a few millimeters in length, land snails are easy to overlook. I hope you will be able to join us to learn a little more about these tiny, yet charismatic species – one of prairie's underdogs.

Best Wishes, Jessica

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- Submitting your volunteer hours.
- Scheduling spring prescribed burns.
- Documentary and Book Reviews.
- Member profile: George and Carmeen Johnston.
- Taxonomy 101: Lyre-leaved rock cress.

TPE Coulee Chapter Officers and Officials for 2011

Name	Office	Phone	Email
Jessica Bolwahn	President	608-637-3753	Ja4bolwahn@hotmail.com
Jim Rogala	Past President	608-786-1855	jrogala@usgs.gov
Scott Cooper	Secretary	608-785-6983	cooper.scot@uwlax.edu
Ned Gatzke	Treasurer	608-269-2033	cngatzke@centurytel.net
Diane Hanson	Member-at-large	608-637-3735	nosnah@mwt.net
Don Nelson	Newsletter editor	608-435-6203	don094@centurytel.net

Coulee Volunteers on TPE Corporate Board and Committees

Name	Office
Jim Rogala	Corporate Board and Land Management committee

Coulee Chapter Business Items

Coulee Chapter Meeting Minutes from 02/29/2011

The meeting was held at UW-La Crosse and was called to order at 10:10.

Attendees: Jessica Bolwahn, Jayne Collins, Ned Gatzke, Paul and Bernadette Hayes, George Johnston, Betty Kruck, Don Nelson, Gordy Powell, Jim Rogala, and Jon Schultz.

Program Presentation: Jessica Bolwahn spoke on *Managing Smooth Brome for Prairie Restoration: Effects of Fire, Herbicide, and Mowing*.

Report from TPE Board of Directors (Jessica Bolwahn acting for Jim Rogala): Jessica reported that TPE is looking for members to serve on the new Education Committee. The "Early Bird" registration deadline for the upcoming conference registration has been moved back. Jessica asked lists of conference donation items by February 1. Jessica also announced that a collection of books on prairie-related topics has been donated to TPE. Some of these titles are out-of-print and are of historical interest.

Chapter Budget: The Coulee Chapter budget was accepted.

Equipment: Funds have been allocated in the budget for more equipment this year. Burn equipment was purchased last year, but several items were back-ordered. Additional safety gear is still needed and Jim suggested we purchase nomex suits in smaller sizes. The possible acquisition of brush cutting equipment was also discussed.

Water Pumps: At our next meeting, Jim will give a demonstration on the basic care for backpack water pumps. Jim is looking for a volunteer to help maintain our water pumps. Gordy Powell said he might be interested.

Display Materials: Public events where we could use the general TPE display or the Hill Prairie display were discussed. In the past, we have had displays at the Kickapoo County Fair and a Woodland Owners "Field Day." We have also inquired about having the displays at the Eco-Park in La Crosse. All members are urged to look for opportunities to use our displays and to relay that information to Jessica or Jim.

Field Trip/Meeting Discussion: Jim asked members to provide ideas for hosting field trips. One possibility would be to have field trips in combination with chapter meetings. We've done something like that informally at some of our spring and summer meetings. It was also suggested that members might host chapter meetings and fieldtrips on their property or at a site with which they are familiar.

Holland Sand Prairie Project: We will be interseeding at Holland Sand Prairie after this spring's prescribed burn. A large crew will be needed to broadcast seed. Jim mentioned the possible purchase of a Traux "Seed Slinger" for use with an ATV.

Videos (CDs): Videos on TPE and on the use of prairie plantings are available. Let Jim know if you're interested.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:05.

Next TPE Coulee Chapter Meeting to be held on March 26th, 2011

Date: Saturday March 26

Time: 10:00

Where: Room 301, Cowley Hall, UW-La Crosse

Directions: (www.uwlax.edu/campus-map/index.htm)

Agenda: The December 2010 meeting was canceled due to the snowstorm and so we have rescheduled Kathryn Perez for the March 26th meeting. Kathryn's talk will be entitled "**Land Snail Diversity of the Driftless Hill Prairies.**" We will review the status of our work sites, plan for the upcoming prescribed burn season, review prescribed burn issues, and have a demonstration on water pump repair.

Planning a Prescribed Burn This Spring?

It's that time of year when our chapter generates a schedule of spring prescribed burns. If you want to have a burn put on the schedule, please provide Jim Rogala with the following information: Owner Name, Prairie Type (e.g., hill prairie, planting), Closest Town/City, Projected Date of Burn (e.g., April 9 or 10, a weeknight the week of April 17, early May), and Contact Person (Name, Phone, Email)

Would You Like Your Coulee Newsletter Sent Electronically?

Please contact Jim Rogala or Don Nelson. The newsletter will be posted on our Chapter website <http://www.theprairieenthusiasts.org/chapter/coulee/goatprairie.htm>.

Volunteer Hours Report

Please provide your TPE volunteer hours to Jim Rogala by March 30th. The preferred method of reporting is by email (jrogala@usgs.gov). However, if you prefer to report via the US Postal Service, you can download a form, fill it out, and mail it to: Jim Rogala, 450 N. Leonard St., West Salem, WI. 54669.

Here are the reporting categories and some examples of what might be included:

I. Land Management & Protection

Project site visits - inspection, biological inventories/surveys, land owner contact/negotiations, equipment purchase, maintenance & inventory, inventory of sites, database and records keeping, field visits, management plan draft/review, management records maintenance, Stewardship or Land Protection Committees.

II. Education and Outreach

Conference planning, field trip planning, field trip leaders, presentations & slide shows, written material preparation (booklets, handouts, articles, etc.)

III. Development/Promotion

Newsletter production & contributions, web site maintenance, grant proposal writing, receptions, media interviews, brochure production, displays, meetings.

IV. Administration

Board & committees, chapter meetings and minutes, assignments, mailings (newsletters, fliers, surveys, etc.), bookkeeping/record keeping, membership & volunteer database keeping.

Prairie Education and Outreach

2011 Annual TPE Conference and Banquet

This year's TPE conference, *Conservation in a Working Landscape*, was held on the campus of the University of Wisconsin-Platteville with a special emphasis on conservation and restoration of prairie ecosystems within working landscapes. The speakers and the presenters reminded us that the viability of the natural world is directly tied to the degree that humans are able to meet their basic needs. No preserve can endure if the local population sees it as a threat to their wellbeing. Curt Meine, our keynote speaker, pointed out that in the 1930's farmers were seen as partners in the efforts to protect soils from the ravages of erosion. Meine felt that since those early days, environmentalists have increasingly viewed those who work the land as part of the problem rather than part of the solution. Meine suggested that this growing divide between those who want to protect land by setting it aside and those who want to live and work on the land has deflected us away from the broader goals of conservation. Many of the conference presenters then provided case studies of how landowners, government agencies and non-profits, like The Prairie Enthusiasts and Trout Unlimited, are cooperating to conserve the natural world in a working landscape.

Green Fire: Leopold's Life and Legacy

A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise - A. L.

Earlier this month, the Nelson's (Don and Carol) and the Gatzke's (Ned and Carol) traveled down to Baraboo for the premier of the new documentary, Green Fire: Aldo Leopold and the Land Ethic for Our Time. The film reviewed Leopold's life and career with an emphasis on his life experiences and how those experiences shaped his thinking. The primary theme of the narrative was the development of Leopold's concept of the land ethic and its influence on how we should view, use, and protect the land and its components; soil, water, plants, and animals. Several contemporary individuals and programs were highlighted to illustrate how the land ethic can be put to work for the benefit of humans, the land and its components. The film portrayed Leopold as a complicated man. A man whose life and thinking incorporated the multiple points-of-view that continue to dominate our ongoing relationship to the land. We found the film both educational and inspirational and we hope you'll take the opportunity to see Green Fire when it's shown near you (to get more information on the film and to find where it will be shown in the future, check www.aldoleopold.org/greenfire). - D.N.

Aldo...again

Looking out over our prairie last Saturday, we were treated to quite a show. Five hawks (two rough-legs, two red-tails and a kestrel) were all in the air scouting for rodents they would like to invite to dinner. The scene brought to mind a passage from "January Thaw" in Leopold's A Sand County Almanac: *The mouse is a sober citizen who knows that grass grows in order that mice may store it as underground haystacks, and the snow falls in order that mice may build subways from stack to stack: supply, demand, and transport all neatly organized. To the mouse, snow means freedom from want and fear. The rough-leg has no opinion why grass grows, but he is well aware that snow melts in order that hawks may again catch mice. He came down out of the Arctic in the hope of thaws, for him a thaw means freedom from want and fear.* Once again, the hawks, the mice and Leopold have reminded me that it's a fine thing to have a prairie. - D. N.

The Tallgrass Prairie Center Guide to Seed and Seedling Identification in the Upper Midwest by Dave Williams, with illustrations by Brent Butler published by University of Iowa Press. Reviewed by Jessica Bolwahn.

I've spent a good portion of the last few summers crawling around on my hands and knees trying to identify prairie seedlings. I sincerely wish this book had been published earlier. There are guides out there published by various sources, but none that I have seen that are as simple, well organized, and detailed as this guide. Plant guides often have complex keys drawing on a large suite of flower or leaf features to positively identify the species. Seedlings have few characteristics and often do not resemble their adult forms.

This book puts together an ease to use key based on the most prominent seedling features. In addition to the key, there are fantastic close-up photos with color-coded arrows highlighting the important features needed for identification. Photos of seeds are included in each description as well. The guide is not comprehensive; it covers just seventy-two species, but they are the more common plants those of us living in the upper Midwest would most likely have in our prairie or native garden.

Coulee Region Member Profile: George and Carmeen Johnston

George Johnston grew up in central Illinois in the heart of the self-proclaimed Prairie State. The reality, of course, is that less than 1/10 of one percent of Illinois' tall grass prairie remains. As a boy, George's personal experience with "prairie" was limited to hunting pheasants among the few prairie plants surviving along a railroad right-of-way. A college field trip to see prairie chickens on a restored prairie clearly illustrated to George what had been lost.

George and Carmeen came to La Crosse in the 1970s when George took a job as a biologist at Dairyland Power. Twenty years later, a magazine article and a public television program helped George rediscover prairies. The article pointed him to The Prairie Enthusiasts and to Prairie Restorations in Minnesota. The outcome was a fifty-acre prairie restoration on a reclaimed ash dumpsite at Dairyland's Genoa power plant. Later, George joined other enthusiasts as a charter member of TPE's Coulee Chapter.

Today, George and Carmeen are engaged in developing prairies on their property on St Mary's Ridge just south of Norwalk. The Johnston's have used prescribed burns to release prairie plants on abandoned pastures and on wooded hillsides. They have also used restorations to incorporate prairie plants into former cropland. The Johnston's efforts have been rewarded with the reemergence of a range of prairie grasses including prairie drop seed and sideoats grama and quality forbs from downy gentian to wood betony. The Johnstons credit Greg Nessler, another Coulee Chapter charter member and owner of Red Buffalo Prairie Restorations, with providing the professional expertise and muscle power to move their prairie projects forward.



George has been an officer in the local chapter and, with Carmeen, served most recently as members of the Fundraising and Endowment Committee. The Johnston's demonstrate that prairies can inspire a high level of enthusiasm in those committed to the future of prairies and savannahs in the Upper Midwest.

Information about Prairies and Oak Savannas

Taxonomy 101 for Plants of the Coulee Goat Prairies by Jim Rogala

Taxonomy 101 for Plants of the Coulee Goat Prairies articles are now on our webpage <http://www.theprairieenthusiasts.org/chapter/coulee/goatprairie.htm>. This collection of articles is intended as a “working document” with newer ones added periodically.

Where Are the Lyre-shaped Leaves?

Sometimes the name of a plant doesn't seem to match the plant itself. In a past article, I mentioned that the harebell's scientific name, *Campanula rotundifolia* (*rotundifolia* meaning “round leaves”), actually derives from the plant's indistinct, sometimes absent, basal leaves. The same is true of the common and species name of the Lyre-leaved rock cress (*Arabis lyrata*). This spindly and short (less than 12” tall) plant often requires one to look closely at the small basal rosette of leaves to see the intricate “lyre” design. As with the harebell, the rock cress' basal leaves may also be absent.

Despite its rather indistinct leaves, thin stems and short stature, this species is actually quite easy to find. The four-petaled bright white flowers are rather small (less than a 1/3”), but they tend to be clustered and so are rather conspicuous. More importantly for identification purposes, this species begins flowering in April when few other plants are blooming. Even though it's a spring bloomer, rock cress can be found still flowering into July.



Lyre-leaved rock cress is a member of the mustard family. Seedpods of mustards can be of two general forms: thin long pods (siliques) or flattened short pods (silicles). The rock cress has siliques. Many mustard species with deeply lobed leaves have the longer seedpods. Common mustards with siliques include non-native weedy species like garlic mustard and yellow-rocket. The native tower mustard also produces siliques. Mustards with shorter seedpods (silicles) include non-natives like field pennycress, shepherd's-purse, and hoary-alyssum. Keep your eyes open for the Lyre-leaved rock cress and the other mustards on your next hike on a Coulee region goat prairie.

Reminder: Keeping Up with Your TPE Dues

To find out if you are current on your TPE dues, just check the mail label on our latest *Prairie Promoter* newsletter. Checking your “dues date” will help you keep up with your membership and make sure you don't miss a single issue of *Promoter* or the Coulee Chapter newsletter.